

**Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials
May 16 – 17, 2007
Atlanta, GA
Minutes**

Committee Members Present:

James Adams	Thomas Lockhart
Les Beavers	Donald Loudner
Stan Brown	Joe Martory
Wilfred Ebel	Ben Spadaro
John Kelly	Judith Young
Rose Elizabeth Lee	

Committee Members Absent:

Jerry Laws, Chairman
James Altmeyer
Judy Bissinger
Bob Cardenas
Carl Kikerpill

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Fred Boyles, National Park Service
Jack Metzler, Jr., Arlington National Cemetery

Ex-Officio Members Absent:

Tom Sole, American Battle Monuments Commission

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees:

The Honorable William F. Tuerk, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Mike Nacincik, Designated Federal Officer, Chief, Communications and Outreach
Support Division, Acting Chair
Steve Muro, Director, Office of Field Programs
Frank Kawulich, Director, MSN II
Paige Lowther, Director, Business Process Improvement Service
Scott Gebhardtshauer, Acting Director, State Veterans Cemetery Grants Program
Sandra Beckley, Director Georgia and Marietta National Cemeteries
Sara Amy Leach, NCA Senior Historian
Karen Ashton, Program Specialist, Memorial Programs Service
Robin Cooper, Outreach Coordinator and Acting Advisory Committee Program Manager

Wednesday, May 16, 2007

The spring meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials for Fiscal Year 2007 was held at the Courtyard by Marriott, Atlanta Buckhead, 3332 Peachtree Road, NE, Atlanta, GA.

Call to Order and Welcome

Acting Chairman Mike Nacincik called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. The Committee members observed a moment of silence to remember Mylio Kraja. Members stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Acting Chairman Nacincik introduced the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, The Honorable William F. Tuerk.

Remarks by Under Secretary Tuerk

The Under Secretary began by welcoming the Committee, including its two newest members, Mrs. Judith C. Young and Mr. Donald E. Loudner. Mrs. Young became active with the Gold Star Mothers following the loss of her son, Jeffrey D. Young, in the terrorist attack on the Marine Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983. During her 22 years with the Gold Star Mothers, she has held numerous leadership positions including National President, 1st Vice President, and Department President of New Jersey. Mrs. Young brings to the Advisory Committee her extensive leadership in representing families who have lost a son or daughter while in the service of our Nation. Along with Mrs. Lee of the Gold Star Wives, she represents the survivor community, one of NCA's prime constituents. Mr. Loudner is a veteran who volunteered for military service – joining the U.S. Army as an infantryman at the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. He served in the Army for 32 years before retiring and joining the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a Federal Administrator Agency Superintendent. In 1984, the Governor of South Dakota appointed him to serve on the South Dakota Veterans Affairs Commission and he continues to serve in that capacity today. Mr. Loudner previously served on the VA Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans as an appointee of Secretary of VA, Togo West and Secretary Anthony Principi. Mr. Loudner currently serves on the National Census Advisory Committee representing the American Indian and Alaska Native populations for the U.S. Census Bureau. And he is now serving a two-year term as National Commander of National American Indian Veterans, Inc. The Under Secretary then presented both Mrs. Young and Mr. Loudner with their Certificates of Appointment.

Under Secretary Tuerk provided a brief overview of the current initiatives within NCA. The demographic facts which led the Congress to direct – and NCA to oversee and manage – the expansion that is now underway in the Nation's veterans' cemeteries are as follows: the average age of still-surviving World War II veterans is now 83, and the average age of surviving Korean War veterans is now 75, and the average age of the Vietnam generation now approaches 60. VA's 125th National Cemetery, South Florida VA National Cemetery in Palm Beach County, just completed its first month of operation, providing a convenient burial option to over 400,000 previously-unerved veterans who reside in the South Florida region. In April, the Under Secretary presided

at the dedication of Sacramento Valley VA National Cemetery in northern California. Since that cemetery began operations in October, the staff has conducted more than 900 burials, which averages 40 services per week.

VA is now committed to establishing six additional national cemeteries, each with initial sections open for burials by the end of 2008, in the regions of: Bakersfield, California; Birmingham, Alabama; Columbia, South Carolina; Jacksonville, Florida; Sarasota, Florida; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition to national cemeteries, a State veterans' cemetery in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Saipan Veterans Cemetery has opened. Since 2001, 22 State veterans' cemeteries in 17 states have opened, providing additional burial options for veterans living in less densely populated areas. Five new state veterans' cemeteries are under construction in Anderson, South Carolina; Shreveport, Louisiana; Radcliff, Kentucky; Glennville, Georgia; and Williamstown, Kentucky. Several more State grant applications should be ready for funding during the next fiscal year. Even while NCA administers a program of growth, the people of NCA have not lost sight of properly executing current responsibilities at existing cemeteries. In the most recent customer survey, 94% of respondents agreed that the quality of service they received at existing cemeteries was excellent. A full 97% stated that the overall appearance of cemeteries was excellent. Only three years ago, an active, open cemetery within 75 miles of one's residence was available to just 75% of our Nation's veterans. Today that figure has increased to 83%. By 2010, NCA expects to have an operating cemetery in proximity to 90% of the Nation's veterans.

Looking even beyond 2010, the independent program evaluation is now underway to assess the full array of memorial programs and burial benefits that will serve veterans in the future. Key elements such as burial space and the National Shrine Commitment will be evaluated but the program evaluation will also review programs and benefits such as VA's provision of headstones and markers, Presidential Memorial Certificates and burial and plot allowances. The study will include an assessment of VA's current 75-mile service area standard. The program evaluation will consider the travel time required for a veteran or family member to reach a national cemetery. The evaluation will also assess the adequacy of the 170,000 veteran population thresholds for establishing new national cemeteries. The results will be used to assess the need for any policy changes and legislative proposals necessary to define burial benefits well into the future. The final report is expected in early 2008 and Committee members will be briefed at the spring 2008 meeting.

The Wiccan pentacle has been added to the list of approved emblems of belief that will be engraved on government-provided headstones and markers. VA acted to settle the lawsuit that had been filed against the Department in the interest of the families concerned and to spare taxpayers the expense of further litigation. The government agreed to settle this litigation once it became evident the Wiccans' application could be favorably considered under proposed rules VA had published for public comment. The first headstones with the Wiccan emblem of belief were shipped on April 27. Two were shipped to Arlington National Cemetery; two to the Circle Sanctuary in Wisconsin; and a fifth was shipped to a private cemetery in Cleveland, Tennessee. NCA has three additional requests for headstones and markers that are being manufactured and

inscribed by contractors, and anticipate receiving several more applications in the weeks ahead.

Under Secretary Tuerk then reminded Committee members of the Echo Taps Worldwide event that occurred on Saturday, May 19 – Armed Forces Day. The goal of Echo Taps is to raise awareness of the acute shortage across the country of live buglers available to perform Taps at the funeral services of veterans and to recruit more buglers and other brass players to perform Taps as a part of the final honors for veterans as they are laid to rest. More than 2,500 volunteers have come forward. They range in age from 9 to 101. The number of buglers by location varies from one to one hundred. NCA wants Taps to be heard at every location where veterans are honored, from private cemeteries to national and state cemeteries to American Battle Monument Cemeteries overseas. Under Secretary Tuerk expressed his appreciation for the efforts of Dick Wannemacher who took the lead in organizing the event in conjunction with Bugles Across America and the VA Volunteer Service.

Field Operations Update

Mr. Muro opened his presentation by reviewing basic benefits and eligibility criteria. He then talked about the importance of pre-placed crypts in terms of saving time, space, and money. A quick look at performance measures clearly shows the progress made in the average number of days to mark graves in national cemeteries, reduced from 50 in 2003 to 24 in 2007. The percent of graves marked within 60 days of interment has shown a steady increase. The cemeteries have seven days to approve the marker, and ten days from the day it is received to set them. NCA boasts a less than 1% error rate in correctly inscribed headstones and markers. Training of new employees and retraining of older employees on new procedures is an ongoing task being met at the St. Louis National Training Center. A sample of training courses being offered are: gardener, supervisor, and appropriation law. Mr. Muro proudly stated as many as 2,000 visitors were on hand to celebrate the recent dedication of the Sacramento Valley VA National Cemetery.

Memorial Service Network (MSN II) Remarks

MSN II director Frank Kawulich first displayed a map of the five regions of the United States that comprise the Memorial Service Networks (MSNs). MSN II consists of ten states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. A total of 31 national cemeteries make up MSN II. Of the 31 cemeteries, 22 are Civil War era (established between 1862 and 1873) and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Nashville National Cemetery is one such cemetery, established in 1866. The cemetery rosters as well as the walls are expensive to maintain. The cemetery is closed to first interments because space doesn't allow for more burials. Chattanooga National Cemetery is another Civil War era cemetery. It is still active and open to new interments. Six Medal of Honor recipients are interred there. Mr. Kawulich then proudly presented several aerial photos, one being that of Florida National Cemetery, the second most active of the national cemeteries, performing almost 7,000 interments in FY06. Next the members saw shots of South Florida VA National Cemetery, opened in April of 2007 for burials. It

is NCA's 125th national cemetery. The first three weeks of operation yielded a total of 260 interments: 52 casket (20%) and 208 cremains (80%).

Communications Management Service Update

Mike Nacincik briefed members on the function of NCA's Communications Management Service, that being to communicate through various venues, the missions and programs of NCA to internal and external audiences. Internal audiences include: VHA, VBA, Central Office staff offices, MSNs, and cemeteries. External audiences include: Congress, media, other government agencies, the Advisory Committee, and the general public. The Communications Management Service is comprised of four divisions, those being: Executive Correspondence; Communications and Outreach Support; Legislative and Regulatory; and History.

The Executive Correspondence Division manages all of NCA written correspondence including: Secretarial, Congressional, White House, general public, and genealogy and FOIA requests. The Communications and Outreach Support Division is responsible for: media response, internet and intranet content management, the NCA national conference and facilities management meeting, special events (including Memorial and Veterans Day activities and new cemetery ceremonies), national stakeholder conferences, the Advisory Committee, speeches, and filming requests. Some of the upcoming events for Outreach include: Memorial Day, the Great Lakes National Cemetery Dedication, the South Florida National Cemetery Dedication, the State Cemetery Grant "Big Check" ceremonies, the NCA and OPA conferences, the Director Intern Graduation ceremony, and Veterans Day. The Legislative and Regulatory Division oversees all NCA congressional, legal, and regulatory actions (Congressional relations, legislative actions, and liaison with General Counsel); and policy dissemination (regulations, policy directives and operational handbooks, and NCA policy notices). The History division is responsible for: archives and artifacts (administrative and oral history and the collections department); historic preservation (research and documentation and maintenance and conservation); and outreach and education.

Budget and Performance Update

Paige Lowther, Director of the Business Process Improvement Service represented the office of Finance and Planning for NCA. The office is responsible for providing the Under Secretary and other senior leaders in NCA with data and information that they need in order to make informed decisions regarding the present and future administrations. There are three offices within Finance and Planning. They are: the Budget and Finance Service; the Policy and Planning Service; and the Business Process Improvement Service.

The most recent additions to the national cemeteries, which brings our total to 125 are: Georgia National Cemetery (Atlanta); Great Lakes National Cemetery (Detroit); National Cemetery of the Alleghenies (Pittsburgh); Sacramento Valley VA National Cemetery; and South Florida VA National Cemetery (Miami area). The six cemeteries currently in planning or beginning the construction process are: Bakersfield, California; Philadelphia,

Pennsylvania; Columbia/Greenville, South Carolina; Birmingham, Alabama; and Sarasota and Jacksonville, Florida. The most recent additions to the State Veterans Cemeteries are: Mission, Texas; Saipan; and Killeen, Texas. Those under construction are: Anderson, South Carolina; Fort Knox, Kentucky; Shreveport, Louisiana; and Glennville, Georgia.

Veteran demographics figures are provided by actuaries in the Policy and Planning Office. The demographics indicate that the projected veteran population will continue to decrease from the present to the year 2030. The ten states having the highest veteran populations are: New York, Illinois, California, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia. Even while the numbers are decreasing for veteran deaths, the numbers of veterans and veteran dependents interred in VA national cemeteries is increasing.

As far as the NCA budget is concerned, the FY08 budget includes a 46% increase in discretionary funding. The hearings that have been completed are: the House and Senate Veterans Affairs (Authorizing) Committees, the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees, and the House Budget Committee. The advance planning construction projects covered as FY08 Major Construction are all Phase I Development at the six new cemeteries and one expansion/improvement project at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Budget request highlights include: operations and maintenance (activation of new cemeteries and interment workload increases), minor construction (a total of \$25 million in new funding will be used primarily for gravesite expansion projects), and the State Cemetery Grants Program (establishing five new cemeteries and expanding three existing cemeteries).

A few words on the independent and objective Burial Benefits Program Evaluation: the evaluation is a collaborative effort between the Office of Policy and Planning, VBA, and NCA. The research topics include: examining current distance and population policies for determining new cemeteries; identifying and evaluating challenges in meeting the National Shrine mandate; examining feasibility of a cash payment in lieu of a burial option; assessing current cash burial/plot allowance; examining factors influencing burial choice; analyzing methods by which veterans/families access burial benefit information; and evaluating impact of the Presidential Memorial Certificate program.

Construction Update

Under Secretary Tuerk provided an update on major construction projects for FY 07: \$7.6 million for Solomon-Saratoga, \$13 million for Dallas-Fort Worth, \$16.9 million for Great Lakes, phase 1B. Minor construction total funds available equals \$30,684,570, including a roll over from FY06. The FY08 major construction request to Congress totaled \$170.4 million, including advanced planning fund, six new cemeteries, and one expansion. The total construction fund request for FY08 for minor construction is \$24,400,000.

The design and construction steps for developing a new national cemetery takes anywhere from four to seven years. The process includes: site evaluation and selection (6 to 12 months); environmental assessment (6 to 12 months); survey and appraisal (3 to 5 months); acquisition (6 to 12 months); master planning (6 to 9 months); construction document preparation (4 to 6 months); and construction (18 to 24 months).

The new cemeteries under the Millennium Act are: Fort Sill (opened in 2001); Pittsburgh (National Cemetery of the Alleghenies opened in 2005), Detroit (Great Lakes National Cemetery opened in 2005); Atlanta (Georgia National Cemetery opened in 2006); Sacramento (Sacramento Valley VA National Cemetery opened in 2006); and South Florida (opened in April 2007). The new cemeteries under Public Law 108-109 are: Bakersfield (Tejon Ranch donated 500 acres); Birmingham (cemetery property will be 479 acres); Columbia/Greenville (a transfer of 600 acres at Fort Jackson by the U.S. Army); Jacksonville (VA is purchasing 525 acres from the city of Jacksonville); Philadelphia (200 acres in Dolington is the preferred location); and Sarasota County (land acquired on April 26, 2007, 245 acres).

Update on Georgia National Cemetery

Sandra Beckley, Director of Georgia and Marietta National Cemeteries, welcomed the Committee and extended her pleasure at the opportunity for members to visit both cemeteries. Joining her was Jim Randles, Vice Chairman of the Georgia Advisory Council representing the Military Order of the Purple Heart. Georgia National Cemetery is built on 775 acres of land that was donated by a World War II veteran, Mr. Hutchins, who stormed the beaches at Normandy, now deceased. It is VA's 123rd national cemetery. There were approximately 600 burials waiting for the cemetery to open in April of 2006. World War II veterans account for 36% of the burials. Of the non-casketed remains, about one half of the veterans choose the columbaria (opened in March 2007) and half choose in-ground burial because they want the upright marker. Both Georgia and Marietta National Cemeteries are maintained by contractors. Marietta is a civil war cemetery, established in 1866. Original burials were remains first collected and interred at Montgomery, Alabama, and from Rome, Dalton, Atlanta, Kenesaw Mountain and other places in Georgia. One Medal of Honor recipient is memorialized with a marker at Marietta.

State Veterans Cemetery Grants Program Update

Acting Director, Scott Gebhardtsbauer presented a slide presentation. He introduced State Cemetery Grants Program (SCGP) basics. The grants are for state-owned and operated cemeteries to establish, expand, or improve the cemeteries. There are currently 43 pre-applications for approximately \$180 million. The average budget amount is \$32 million per year, as was granted for FY07. Public Law 105-368, originally proposed by VA, was enacted in January of 1999. The law provides: that VA is authorized to provide grants only to states; that NCA pays up to 100% of allowable costs (design, construction, administration, etc.); that there is no reimbursement for land value; that NCA pays for equipment for new cemeteries (providing a generic list of tractors, mowers, etc.); that there is close VA scrutiny of plans (VA must approve before

bidding); and that the state pays upfront design costs that are reimbursed after grant award.

The five new cemeteries under construction are: Shreveport, LA; Anderson, SC; Radcliff, KY; Glennville, GA; and Williamstown, KY. There are also four major expansion/improvement projects underway at existing cemeteries: two at BG Doyle, NJ (administrative and maintenance building and gravesites); Boulder City, NV; and Agawam, MA. 35 states are participating in the program and operate 65 cemeteries. That total will be 44 including Guam, Saipan, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Public Law 109-461 Section 403 provides for American Indian participation as well.

FY07 new cemetery grant awards recipients that are in construction are Glennville, GA and Williamstown, KY. Those preparing construction plans are: Des Moines, IA; Abilene, TX; and Missoula, MT.

FY07 grant awards for existing cemeteries with expansion grants are: Crownsville, MD; Cheltenham, MD; Boulder City, NV; Exeter, RI; and West Hawaii - Kona. New cemeteries under design are: Ft. Riley, KS; Ft. Leonard Wood, MO; Springvale, ME; Alliance, NE; Ft. Polk, LA; and Aguadilla, PR. Expansion and improvement projects under design are: Garrison Forest, MD; Stockley, DE; Union Grove, WI; Beaver Brook, WI; Wrightstown, NJ; Bluffdale, UT; Knoxville, TN; and Randolph, VT.

Memorial Programs Service Update

Karen Ashton began the Memorial Programs Service (MPS) update with the mission of MPS, that is, MPS provides lasting memorials for the graves of eligible veterans and honors their service through Presidential Memorial Certificates. The organization structure of MPS has not changed except for the addition of remote processing sites. Employees located at remote sites process VA Form 40-1330s. Those are applications for a headstone or marker which will be placed in a private cemetery. Applications for a headstone or marker can be received via written correspondence, fax, or completed online and mailed or faxed to the office. MPS processing sites are located at: Fort Leavenworth, KS; Lebanon, PA; and Nashville, TN. Remote employees are located at: Fort Sill National Cemetery, Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery, Puerto Rico National Cemetery (all requests for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), Fort Custer National Cemetery, and Los Angeles National Cemetery. The applicant assistance unit consists of seven employees that receive 300 to 400 calls per day. They provide the following services to callers: status of headstone or marker orders; replace damaged and incorrectly inscribed monuments; obtain tracking results for monuments that have not yet been received; handle requests to pick up bronze markers for recycling; and refer other calls to appropriate VA offices.

MPS is also responsible for issuing Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMCs). President Kennedy initiated the White House Program in 1962 and each subsequent president has continued the program. Administration and processing responsibility was transferred to NCA in October of 1990. The PMC Program is one of the most positive public relations instruments available to the Department of Veterans Affairs today. More than 400,000 certificates are issued annually.

Current initiatives in MPS include: the e-1330, customer notification postcards, and an MPS brochure. The electronic or “e” form 1330 is a web-based version of VA Form 40-1330. Right now the form is available to print out, complete and mail or fax in to MPS. Within the next two months applicants will have access and be able to submit via the Internet. The customer notification postcards will be system generated automatically to verify receipt, approval, and processing of VA Form 40-1330. They will be sent via the US Postal Service and contain an expected delivery date and confirm a delivery address. The MPS brochure is a new outreach marketing tool available in hardcopy and on the NCA website. It highlights the most common errors made when completing the VA Form 40-1330.

Current legislation proposals include: H.R. 358, which makes the second marker benefit permanent. Introduced January 9, 2007, it permits the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide a second marker for veterans who died between November 1, 1990 and September 11, 2001; H.R. 797, introduced February 5, 2007, authorizes the provision of bronze representations of the letter “V” (for veterans) for the graves of eligible individuals buried in private cemeteries in lieu of a government-provided headstone or marker.

Historical Overview of NCA

The historical overview was presented by NCA Senior Historian, Sara Amy Leach. Ms. Leach first displayed a map of locations of national cemeteries following the civil war. The cemeteries then were of a small size with flat topography and geometrical forms, usually established at existing facilities and very military-inspired in design. The new cemetery landscapes, where the layout follows natural topography (park or lawn type cemeteries), were established at new locations and included more acreage. Examples are found at Marietta, GA; Nashville and Chattanooga, TN; and Vicksburg, MS. Features include monumental archways and burial sections intended to showcase memorials. The cemetery at Marietta was an ideal location because of the close proximity to locations where several battles and skirmishes occurred, within a 200 mile radius. Just three years after opening, Marietta had nearly 10,000 burials including one-third unknowns (soldiers including 158 U.S. Colored Troops, and a few citizens and employees). An early sketch reveals the hill where the flag is stationed and how the sections conformed to the natural features of the landscape, creating a very picturesque view. Next the Committee viewed a slide of Section H in Chattanooga National Cemetery. It is triangular in shape, with the Andrews Raiders Monument of 1890 in the center.

The National Cemetery Administration has approximately 1,000 historic monuments. Nearly 300 are one hundred years old or more and date from the Civil War. About 90 of the monuments are included in the Smithsonian Institution’s database of public sculpture. Many of the older monuments are facing structural challenges because of failure of foundations, missing or broken components, continuous water damage, and stone deterioration from environmental factors such as air pollution. Ms. Leach provided six examples of Civil War monuments in need of care but there is no targeted funding for repair or conservation of memorials.

There has been a surge in the number of memorials being installed in NCA cemeteries in the past two decades. As of May 2007, there are a total of 886, with more than 600 of those having been installed since 1990. Accountability for memorials is important because memorials are: historic and protected, even when new; VA assets with intrinsic historic and monetary value; donated objects that NCA legally owns; a component of the National Shrine Commitment. NCA demonstrates accountability for memorials by: gathering an inventory from 2003 – 2005; having Directors report new memorials within 30 days of installation; and having Directors certify the presence of memorials at the fiscal year end.

Current projects in the History Program include: a two-year headstone cleaning study by the National Park Service, National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, 2005 – 2007 (consists of an interagency agreement for the first scientific evaluation of five cleaning agents at five cemeteries in search of the most effective product and least harm to gravestones); the Cenotaphs repair and rehabilitation at Congressional Cemetery by the National Park Service, Historic Preservation Training Center, 2006 – 2007 (consists of an interagency agreement for testing and repair of some of the National Cemetery Administration's oldest historic resources, to coincide with the bicentennial of the cemetery); the black and white photography of historic cemeteries (per Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act, year four – images become part of the Library of Congress collection and can be used for outreach, publications, etc.); the pilot GIS-GPS mapping of Alexandria National Cemetery in Virginia; and the National Register of Historic Places nomination for Baltimore National Cemetery.

Thursday, May 17, 2007

The Committee met at 8:30 a.m. and departed for Georgia National Cemetery. After entering the cemetery grounds, the Committee was greeted by cemetery Director

Beckley at the administration and maintenance building. Georgia National Cemetery is a spacious cemetery, overlooking a great expansion of forest. There are 3,000 pre-placed crypts in each of six sections for a total of 18,000 crypts ready for occupancy. The cemetery is averaging approximately 68 interments per month right now. The cemetery is currently utilizing a columbaria, a scattering area with flowers, a public information building, and a large committal shelter. The buildings are beautifully constructed of Georgia marble and accented with black granite. A full 350 acres can be developed for interments. The wreath-laying ceremony was conducted by Judith Young, Joseph Martory, and Mike Nacincik.

Next the Committee toured the Marietta National Cemetery. It is a small (23.3 acres) but impressive cemetery and closed to new interments. Space restrictions only permit interments of spouses or dependents, which account for about 25 burials per year. It is supervised by Georgia National Cemetery. The cemetery was established in 1866. It is listed in the Register of Historic Places.

Committee Business Session

The session began promptly at 2:00pm.

Recap of Recommendations and Endorsements from November, 2006 Advisory Committee Meeting in Washington, DC

Recommendation 1: Acknowledge the Committee's support of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) "Veterans Pride Initiative" in which veterans are encouraged to wear their military medals on Veterans Day, Memorial Day and other national holidays.

VA Response: The Department appreciates the Committee's support. Endorsement by Committee members and other influential citizens will be needed to help build recognition, support, and participation in this initiative.

Recommendation 2: Explore the possibilities of providing the Intranet BIRLS/BDN Access (IBBA) system to the Department of the Interior, National Park Service national cemeteries, Anderson National Historic Site, and Andrew Johnson National Historic Site to enhance burial eligibility verification.

VA Response: The matter was researched and the initiative declined. Governance for access to BIRLS is covered in 38 CFR 14.640-14.643, the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act. In 1998, the issue was raised, researched, and declined with respect to access by State veterans' cemeteries. After consultation, the restrictions that prohibit granting access to NPS entities continue to apply. The Department recommends that NPS cemeteries establish relationships with their nearest VA national cemetery for assistance with eligibility determinations.

Recommendation 3: Commend the efforts of the American Battle Monuments Commission, National Park Service, and the National Cemetery Administration's staff for their informative presentations on their programs at this meeting.

VA Response: Meeting agenda elements are intended to help equip members with up-to-date information, so they may best provide advice in keeping with the Committee's mission. Briefings by two of our ex-officio members and the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs were intended to advance this purpose.

Recommendation 4: Commend Advisory Committee member, Benedict Spadaro, for his work with the Gold Star Mothers (GSM) to change the GSM's eligibility requirements to allow non-U.S. citizen mothers to join the GSM if their child, who was a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, should die on active duty.

VA Response: Individual veteran service organizations must make their own decisions regarding membership eligibility. The Department commends Benedict Spadaro on his continued efforts to seek ways to more effectively honor our veterans and their families.

New Business

Mike Nacincik led the formulation of recommendations. All were approved unanimously. They are:

Recommendation 1: The Committee suggests that NCA advise Congress to review the use of a "V" to mark veterans civilian markers in private cemeteries as described in H.R. 797 Bronze "V" Marker Option. The committee feels that the public will be confused by the "V" or not understand what it represents and suggests that instead of a "V" that the word "Veteran" be considered. The military uses a similar "V-device" with military medals to denote valor.

Recommendation 2: The Committee asks that VA contact the Federal Aviation Administration on behalf of Department of Veterans Affairs, National Park Service and state veterans' cemeteries to develop policies to reduce increasing noise levels at veterans cemeteries due to the low flying aircraft.

Recommendation 3: The Committee commends the National Cemetery Administration and National Park Service for their joint Global Positioning System mapping of Alexandria, Va., National Cemetery and recommends that this be considered for future use by NCA.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the National Cemetery Administration determine the feasibility to produce 10"x4"x42" shield and raised letter headstones to replace Civil War era headstones.

Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends an adequate burial allowance to off-set the cost of veteran burials in state veteran cemeteries under the provisions of the State Cemetery Grants Program.

Recommendation 6: The Committee recommends that the State Cemetery Grants Program funding be increased from 32 to 50 million dollars beginning in FY 2009.

Recommendation 7: The Committee commends the Memorial Service Network II, Georgia National Cemetery staff and National Cemetery Administration Veterans Affairs Central Office Staff for their work in making this a successful advisory committee meeting.

The dates chosen for the fall meeting were October 31st and November 1st. The location will be Washington, DC. The Committee was adjourned.

Michael Nacincik
Designated Federal Officer
Acting Chair

